
Early Intervention Infant, Toddler, and Preschool

Guidelines to Support the Early Intervention Process:



Transition

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INTRODUCTION TO THE TRANSITION GUIDELINES

Transitions occur for all of us at various times in our lives. Transitions in early intervention early intervention services can mean many different things. Typically we think of children transitioning from the infant/toddler early intervention program to the preschool early intervention program. However, transitions occur anytime a child enters or returns home from the hospital, begins attending a child care program, moves to a new county or state, or exits the program because they no longer need early intervention. While all transitions are important times to support and enhance the family's capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child, this document is specific to the transition period that occurs as the child turns three years of age and is exiting the infant/toddler early intervention program to the preschool early intervention program or to other community programs.

Transition planning is a collaborative, extensive, and dynamic series of conversations and activities that should begin at the first meeting with the family. Transition must be viewed as a process rather than a specific event. The process should begin early to promote and ensure continuity of service and reduce family interruptions while preparing children for their program options (Hanson, J. et al., 2000). A discussion should occur at the initial visit to inform families that early intervention is a birth to school-age program and that at age three, the state funding source changes and the child's services and providers may change based on the child's needs. As the child approaches transition, the early intervention team must include in the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) the steps that will be taken to support the transition of the child. These steps include discussions, support and guidance to parents, preparation of the child for changes in service delivery, and sharing of information.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Begin With the End in Mind

Early intervention supports are time limited in the larger context of the family's life, and therefore should focus on ensuring that the few years in early intervention build competence across the family and child's lifespan. Reliance on other family and community resources builds the competence of families to be effective in helping their child grow and develop after early intervention services are no longer available or appropriate. Therefore, transition planning needs to begin with the first contact the service coordinator has with the family. It may seem strange to talk to a family about transition when their child is a very young infant, but parents need to be fully informed about early intervention services. Begin by having conversations with families to explain that early intervention supports and services are available to help them and their child until their child reaches kindergarten. Discuss with families how supports and services will change over time to meet the developmental needs of their child. In some cases, the services and the providers will change when their child reaches three years of age. Explain the ways in which services and supports are provided for children from birth to three and from three to school-age programs and how they may appear different because of both the age of the child and the legislative requirements that describe how services and supports can be provided. Highlight for families the many similarities between the infant/toddler and preschool programs.

Talk About the Future

Use every opportunity with a family to talk about the future and how things will evolve for their child. Explain how a child's development changes as the child nears three years of age. Children become more social and begin to learn by imitating their peers and adults. Three-year-olds begin to demonstrate increased independence and can also begin to object to major changes in their routines. Have conversations with the family to determine:

- Did their older children attend preschool or participate in community activities, and at what age?
- What resources are available that the family already uses that will make this transition easier for them?
- Is their child already involved in a child care or other community activities?
- How does their child handle changes in his/her routine?

The more you know about the child and the family, the easier it will be to plan for a successful transition.

Anticipatory guidance can help to relieve fear and anxiety of an event that is expected to be stressful. Anticipatory guidance is a proactive, intentional, developmentally-based technique that focuses on the needs of the child and family. By providing practical information to parents before significant milestones occur, such as transition, parents can anticipate the impending changes, maximize their child's developmental potential and identify their child's and family's needs, which helps to ensure their confidence in the transition process. Infant/toddler early intervention program staff should provide anticipatory guidance to families as they make program option decisions for their child, including the requirements for obtaining an evaluation, eligibility requirements, the timelines for registering, and the age cut-off of some programs.

“When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look so long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.”

- Helen Keller

Individualize

Each transition plan you write will look different. Transition planning requires an understanding of the family and the child's unique circumstances and needs. Transition planning can be a helpful way to provide individual support to the family to enhance their capacity to meet the developmental needs of their child. Planning is done for all children regardless of their continued eligibility for further early intervention services. When completing the transition plan and/or developing IFSP outcomes around transition, remember to focus on the following:

Skills needed by the child:

- Are there skills the child needs to learn to be successful in the next environment, such as self care needs, following directions, playing with others?
- Who will teach the skills to the child?
- What are the routines in which the child naturally will practice the skills (such as, meal time, getting dressed)?

Adaptations/acquisition:

- Are there changes that can be made in the child's current environment that will support the transition, such as providing more interactions with other children or giving opportunities for greater independence?
- Are there toys, books, equipment, or other objects to adapt or acquire which will be needed or used in the next environment (such as, feeding utensils, special seating)?

Community resources and family activities:

- Are there community resources/activities that would support learning in the next environment, such as playing and working with others?

Family-desired connections or information needed:

- Identify the contact persons in the receiving program, for example, the preschool early intervention program or neighborhood childcare program.
- Help the family share information with the receiving program about current child/family routines and relationships and routines that are predictable in the new environment.
- Determine whether connections can be made with families whose children have recently made a transition to another setting.

Find the Most Appropriate Match

Parents have decisions to make before their child turns three. There is a range of opportunities available to parents to meet the needs of their child and their family. Whatever the decision, families need to be aware of all the possibilities so they can make informed decisions.

Children receiving early intervention services should participate in early childhood education programs with their typically developing peers to the maximum extent appropriate. Transition planning should include strategies for assuring that services change to meet the changing developmental needs of the child, rather than changing simply because funding streams change. Changes in services can be aligned to the transitions a child may have as a result of participating in Pre K Counts, Head Start, child care, or other early childhood education programs.

DEVELOP INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

Infant and toddler and preschool early intervention programs are encouraged to meet regularly to discuss general transition issues, concerns, and procedures. Feedback should be provided between agencies if procedures they are using, or services that they are recommending regarding outcomes, cause difficulty during the transition process. Any concerns at transition that result in mediation or due process should be immediately shared and preventative strategies should be developed. Concerns should be addressed openly to promote future successful transitions for all children and their families. If the concerns are not resolved, infant and toddler and preschool early intervention programs should seek additional guidance from state early intervention personnel.

When there is a working relationship between the infant/toddler and preschool early intervention programs based on mutual respect and understanding of the other's system, transition becomes much smoother. A good interagency agreement will define roles and timelines for those involved in the transition process. When both parties have an agreement on policies and procedures, and understand their role in the process, the family will benefit from the collaboration between programs. This understanding can be accomplished through a strong local interagency agreement developed through the Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC). An interagency agreement is not a contract. It describes the policies, procedures, and working relationships among the sending and receiving agencies (Wischnowski, Fowler, and McCollum, 2000). Local interagency agreements related to transition shall include, but may not be limited to the following:

- Participant attendance for the transition meeting
- Location of the meeting and follow up correspondence
- Transfer of information and timelines for the transfer of information
- Transition point person from each agency
- Evaluation procedure agreements

The local interagency agreement shall also include procedures for collaboration between the infant/toddler and preschool early intervention programs on transition activities for a

toddler, referred for the first time to the early intervention program, and who is within 90 days of their third birthday. These procedures should address:

- Timely notification from the infant/toddler early intervention program
- The person/s responsible for completing evaluations to ensure unnecessary reevaluation of children
- Timely development of an IFSP or IEP for the toddler
- The assurance of compliance with requirements of Part C and Part B of IDEA

In addition to a good working interagency agreement, it is important that all staff working with children receive adequate training on transition. All infant/toddler and preschool staff should receive the necessary training on the coordination of transition services on an annual basis. It is encouraged that, when possible, programs jointly train staff so that there is a shared understanding of each other's regulations, practices, and timelines.

ELIGIBILITY AND EVALUATIONS

If it is anticipated that the child will transition to preschool early intervention, it is important that the family understands the evaluation and procedures. Eligibility criteria should be discussed when planning for preschool transition. The family, as well as the sending and the receiving agency, should understand why the child has been determined eligible for infant/toddler early intervention. Infant/toddler qualified personnel can use informed clinical opinion on an independent basis to establish a child's eligibility even when other instruments do not establish eligibility. However, a child cannot be eligible for preschool early intervention services based only on informed clinical opinion, so this topic must be addressed by the infant/toddler early intervention program prior to any transition activities.

TRANSITION NOTIFICATION

For a toddler not fewer than 90 days before their third birthday and who may be eligible for preschool early intervention services, the Bureau of Early Intervention Services, in collaboration with the infant/toddler early intervention programs shall notify the preschool early intervention program that the toddler will reach the age of eligibility for preschool early intervention services. To assist with this notification process, prior to April 2 of each year, and on a quarterly basis thereafter, the Bureau of Early Intervention Services shall identify and provide to the preschool early intervention programs the following information on toddlers who will turn three during the upcoming year (July 1-June 30) and who may be eligible for the preschool early intervention program per 34 CFR §303.401(d):

- Name
- Date of birth
- Parent contact information (including parents' names, addresses, and telephone numbers)

For a toddler who has been determined eligible for infant/toddler early intervention services between 45 days and 90 days before the toddler's third birthday and who may be eligible for the preschool early intervention program, the infant/toddler early intervention program shall notify the preschool early intervention program, as soon as possible after determining the toddler's eligibility that the child will soon reach the age of eligibility for preschool early intervention services as per 34 CFR §303.209(b)(ii).

If a toddler is referred to the infant/toddler program fewer than 45 days before the toddler's third birthday and that toddler may be eligible for preschool early intervention services, with parental consent, the infant/toddler early intervention program shall refer the toddler to the preschool early intervention program. The infant/toddler early intervention program is not required to conduct an evaluation, assessment or an initial Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) meeting for these toddlers per 34 CFR §303.209(b)(iii).

In order to share additional information about a child and family during the transition process, the family must provide informed consent. Informed consent means that parents and guardians are aware that information, such as evaluation, assessment, and the child's IFSP will be provided to the receiving agency and consent to its release. Parents must sign a release of information form before this type of information is shared.

THE TRANSITION PLAN

The first place that transition information is documented as part of the IFSP is in the special considerations section. There are two questions each team is asked to answer:

- Is it anticipated that the infant/toddler or preschooler will be transitioning from the early intervention program because of a transition in the life of the family and child?
- Is this an IFSP for a toddler who is close to his/her second birthday?

If the team answers "yes" to either of these questions, then they need to complete a transition plan within the appropriate timelines.

The development of the transition plan is an important step in the transition process. The team has the opportunity to reflect on the conversations they have had and review the information they know concerning what will be supportive to the child, family and receiving agency over the next several months. In developing the plan, the team has the opportunity to review program options with families to ensure a seamless transition. It also is an opportunity to discuss and prepare for any changes that may occur during the transition period.

The transition steps and services outlined in the plan shall be developed not fewer than 90 days and, at the discretion of all parties, not more than 9 months before the toddler's third birthday. At the time when the child turns 2 years, 3 months old, the team should begin to document on the transition plan the individualized supports, strategies, and steps they will take to support the child and family. The transition plan should be documented at the IFSP meeting or IFSP review after the child turns 2 years, 3 months old. The development of the transition plan does not require an additional IFSP meeting. If a child is referred after they are 2 years, 3 months old, the transition plan should be completed as part of the initial IFSP. Combining the transition plan and the transition meeting in some cases may be appropriate, however, if

for some reason the meeting does not occur, the transition plan still needs to be developed within the appropriate timelines.

Transition plans must include both the steps to exit the infant/toddler program as well as the supports identified as needed:

- Activities to support the transition of the child as identified by the IFSP team
- Strategies for supporting the toddler and his or her family
- Discussions with parents regarding future program options and other matters related to transition of their child (including Head Start or other preschool options)
- Preparation of the toddler for changes in service delivery, including activities to help the toddler adjust to, and function in, a new setting, if appropriate
- Confirmation that information about the toddler has been transmitted to the preschool early intervention program
- Other steps, which will vary depending on the program to which the child is transitioning

The transition plan can be reviewed and revised at any time during the process. Information can be added and dated as necessary. Service coordination case notes should also reflect revisions to the plan. A completed transition plan does not take the place of the transition meeting, which must occur not less than 90 days prior to the child's third birthday and, at the discretion of all parties, not more than 9 months before the child's third birthday.

The transition meeting to develop the transition plan shall be held in settings and at times that are convenient for the family; and, in the native language of the family or other mode of communication used by the family, unless it is clearly not feasible to do so (as required in federal regulations 34 CFR 303.342(d) and (e) and 303.343(a)).

TRANSITION MEETING REQUIREMENTS

A transition meeting that includes, at a minimum, the family, a representative of the infant/toddler early intervention program, and a representative of the preschool early intervention program shall be scheduled for each toddler. The transition meeting shall be scheduled in accordance with IDEA regulations at 34 CFR 303.209(c), which specifies that the transition meeting for a child who may be eligible for preschool early intervention services must be held, with the approval of the family of the toddler, at least 90 days, (and at the discretion of all parties, not more than 9 months) before the child is eligible for preschool early intervention services.

In the case of a toddler who may not be eligible for preschool early intervention services, the infant/toddler early intervention program, with the approval of the toddler's family, shall make reasonable efforts to convene a meeting to discuss other life experiences that will enhance the child's development, community services and supports that may be available to the toddler. This meeting shall include the family, representative(s) from the infant/toddler early intervention program and representative(s) from appropriate

community services. The planning meeting should address concerns and issues the family may have related to child development and include discussion about linking the child and family to other community supports. Discussion from the planning meeting, follow-up activities, and dates for completion of such activities must be documented and signed by the parent and the service coordinator.

Letters of invitation for transition to the preschool early intervention program or to other community services must be sent to the family, preschool early intervention program and other participants no later than 30 days before the scheduled transition meeting date, unless the parties all agree to meet within shorter timelines.

If any changes to the IFSP are anticipated between the transition meeting and when the toddler transitions, the IFSP team shall invite the preschool early intervention program to meet either in person or on the phone to discuss those changes. If the initial transition meeting occurs six or more months prior to the toddler's third birthday, the transition plan shall be updated at least quarterly from the time of the transition meeting. The updated plan shall include documentation of the progress toward implementing transition activities. The preschool early intervention program shall be invited to any meeting related to updating the transition plan and shall also receive a copy of the updated plan.

CONCLUSION

Early intervention has the unique opportunity to empower families to be informed decision makers. Therefore, it is critical that transition discussions be embedded in the ongoing IFSP planning of supports and services for all children and families. By including the family from the beginning, and encouraging their participation as part of the team throughout their early intervention experience, we can enhance their capacity to support the growth and development of their child. The transition of a child out of early intervention or to a new program, because the child has developed many new skills and accomplished many outcomes, should be a time for celebration.

RESOURCES

The following websites will guide the reader to additional information related to supporting the early intervention process:

- Council For Exceptional Children, Division of Early Childhood
www.dec-sped.org/
- Zero To Three
www.zerotothree.org
- Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center
www.ectacenter.org
- Family Guided Approaches to Collaborative Early Intervention Training and Services
<http://facets.lsi.ku.edu/>
- Culturally & Linguistically Appropriate Services, Early Childhood Research Institute
<http://clas.uiuc.edu/>
- Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)/Early Intervention Technical Assistance
<http://www.pattan.net/>

For additional information regarding transition:

- The National Early Childhood Transition and Training Center (NECTC),
<http://www.hdi.uky.edu/SF/NECTC/Home.aspx>
 - NICHCY: National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities,
<http://nichcy.org/babies/transition>
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- Wischnowski, M.W., Fowler, S.A., & McCollum, J.A. (2000). Supports and barriers to writing an interagency agreement on the preschool transition. *Journal of Early Intervention*, 23(4), 294-307.

